

# Hernando De Soto: A Brief Biography

by Paul E. Hoffman

Like many prominent persons of his time, Hernando de Soto's date of birth is unknown. Estimates range from 1496 to 1501.<sup>1</sup> But De Soto's own testimony in late October 1535 was that he was thirty-five, and thus born in 1500.<sup>2</sup> The idea that he was born in 1496 seems to have arisen from De Soto's testimony in 1536 that he was "about forty" and from an effort by later writers to make Lambert A. Wilmer's biographical "facts" fit with the date (1519) that De Soto was alleged to have gone to the Indies. Wilmer himself says that De Soto was born in 1500.<sup>3</sup> Until additional evidence turns up, a birth date of 1500 seems most likely.

The place of De Soto's birth remains controversial. Both Villanuevas in the immediate vicinity of Badajoz have claimed him on the basis of Garcilaso de la Vega's statement that De Soto was born in Villanueva de Barcarrota. Villanueva de la Serena is not mentioned in any account or document. Saying De Soto was born in Barcarrota seems to have been Garcilaso's droll way of resolving the rival claims of Jerez de los Caballeros and Badajoz. Barcarrota

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<sup>1</sup>John R. Swanton, *Final Report of the United States De Soto Expedition Commission*, 1938, reprint with introduction by Jeffrey Brain (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1985), 67; curiously, Swanton mentions that De Soto stated his age and place of birth in manuscript sources but fails to say what he said.

<sup>2</sup>Merits and Services interrogatory for Alonso Martín de San Benito, Lima, 26 October 1535, in José Toribio Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico: Vasco Núñez de Balboa, Hernando de Magallanes y sus compañeros*, 3 vols. (Santiago, Chile: Imprenta Universitaria, 1913-20), 2:360.

<sup>3</sup>James Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), 198; Wilmer claimed that De Soto came under Pedrarias's protection at age seventeen, spent six years at a university (Zaragoza), and then in 1519 [at the age of twenty-three] went to the Indies with his patron, who had returned to Spain in that year. Lambert A. Wilmer, *The Life, Travels and Adventures of Ferdinand de Soto, Discoverer of the Mississippi* (Philadelphia: J.T. Lloyd, 1858), 18-20.

is roughly halfway between them. Local lore to the contrary, there is no evidence De Soto was born or lived there.<sup>4</sup>

Solar and Rújula make a case for Jerez de los Caballeros on the basis of two documents. The first is De Soto's *expediente* for membership in the Order of Santiago. Among the testimony of nine witnesses is the explicit statement of Suero Vazquez de Moscoso that De Soto was born in Jerez and Alvaro Romo's less direct statement that De Soto's parents had lived in Jerez after their marriage and that he had seen Hernando in his parents' home there.<sup>5</sup> The second document is De Soto's will, in which he makes provision for the construction of a chapel in the church of San Miguel in Jerez de los Caballeros, in which he was to be buried and his parents reburied. His will does *not* say he was a native of that town.<sup>6</sup> To these Swanton added the statement of the Gentleman of Elvas that De Soto was born in Jerez de Badajoz.<sup>7</sup> Porrás Barrenechea notes that De Soto claimed to be a native (*natural*) of Jerez in testimony given at Seville in 1536, although in another place he said that he was a *vecino* of that town, which is not a claim of nativity.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, Badajoz was mentioned during his life as his birthplace. For example, the order for the investigation of his lineage preparatory to granting him membership in the Order of Santiago states that he was a native (*natural*) of Badajoz, and that is where the inquiry was conducted. Ordinarily, such inquiries were made in the person's hometown because that was where the most reliable witnesses as to his ancestry would be found. In a similar vein, his dowry agreement with Isabel de Bobadilla (November 14, 1536) states that he was a native (*natural*) and *vecino* (owner of a house) of Badajoz.<sup>9</sup>

The question of his birthplace thus resolves itself into the rival claims of

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<sup>4</sup>Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida*, trans. Charmion Shelby, herein, vol. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Antonio del Solar y Taboada and José de Rújula y de Ochotorena, *El Adelantado Hernando de Soto: Breves noticias y nuevos documentos para su biografía* (Badajoz, Spain: Ediciones Arqueros, 1929), 133, 138.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, 205–21, from a copy in Archivo General de Indias, Seville (AGI), Justicia 750; see also herein, vol. 2.

<sup>7</sup>"The Account by a Gentleman from Elvas," *True Relation of the Hardships Suffered by Governor Hernando de Soto & Certain Portuguese Gentlemen During the Discovery of the Province of Florida, Now newly set forth by a Gentleman of Elvas*, trans. and ed. James Alexander Robertson, herein, vol. 1. Cited hereafter as *Elvas, Relation*.

<sup>8</sup>Porrás Barrenechea, notes to the "Relación" of Diego de Trujillo, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st Series 3 vols. (Lima: Editores Asociados, 1968), 2:64.

<sup>9</sup>Solar and Rújula, *El Adelantado Hernando de Soto*, 125 and 158, respectively; see also herein, vol. 2.

Jerez de los Caballeros and the city of Badajoz. De Soto's father was a native of the former, his mother a native of the latter.<sup>10</sup> His parents lived in both places during De Soto's infancy and boyhood, according to most witnesses in the Santiago expediente. De Soto's willingness to claim birth in both places means that no firm conclusion can be reached on the basis of his evidence. On a numerical count of the available sources, Jerez emerges as the "winner," but the official nature of the Santiago investigation lends weight to Badajoz (city). Perhaps the truth is that he was actually born in Badajoz, probably in his mother's family's house, but was almost immediately taken to and largely raised in his father's hometown of Jerez. We may agree with Lockhart that "all that we can assert categorically, given the usage of the times, is that De Soto felt himself to be from Jerez or its environs."<sup>11</sup>

There is little doubt that his parentage was noble, although much of the genealogy presented by authors such as Solar and Rújula must be viewed with great caution, coming as it does from eighteenth-century sources. The eighteenth century was a period when "historians" produced genealogies of some noble families that can be shown to be inaccurate at many points for which there is independent documentation.

De Soto is usually said to have been poor prior to going to the Indies. Heretofore, this claim was based on Oviedo's and Elvas's statements, repeated by Garcilaso, that De Soto went to the Indies with only a sword and buckler.<sup>12</sup> The veracity of this assertion is seemingly attested by Ruth Pike's note that De Soto (and his longtime partner, Hernán Ponce de León) borrowed money from a Genoese banker at Seville, probably so that he could equip himself and pay his fare in the Pedrarias fleet.<sup>13</sup> Obtaining such a loan suggests that De Soto may have been more short on cash than poor in the absolute terms that his biographers usually suggest. The point of Elvas's account, after all, is in its next sentence, which describes De Soto's return to Spain with a 180,000-cruzado fortune. De Soto, in short, was another "rags to riches" success story from the Indies.

De Soto went to Castilla del Oro with the expedition of Pedrarias (Pedro

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<sup>10</sup>Solar and Rújula, *El Adelantado Hernando de Soto*, Expediente of Santiago, passim; all witnesses agree on this point.

<sup>11</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 199.

<sup>12</sup>Elvas, *Relation*, herein, vol. 1; Garcilaso de la Vega, *La Florida*, herein, vol. 2; Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general de las Indias*, 1851, rpt., 5 vols. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1959), does not comment on De Soto's economic status when he left Spain.

<sup>13</sup>Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese and the Opening of the New World* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1966), 102, n. 1, and 194.

Arias de Avila) when it sailed on February 25, 1514. Swanton cites a witness in the Isabel de Bobadilla—Hernán Ponce lawsuit of 1539 to that effect.<sup>14</sup> Pike's discovery of the loans taken out in 1514 removes any remaining doubt.

By the date of De Soto's first known participation in an expedition, the worst of the "starving time" of the Pedrarias expedition was over, although hunger continued to plague the Spaniards for years afterward. Even though the Pedrarias expedition had been limited to twelve hundred persons, they were too many for the food resources of Darien and those they had brought. One estimate has it that by March 1515, when two caravels arrived from Spain with food, as many as seven hundred of the original twelve hundred had died or returned to the Antilles. Too, the Spaniards had fallen into a pattern of raids directed against the Indians in which finding food was almost as important as finding gold. Thus large numbers of men had been sent off with Luís Carrillo, Juan de Ayora (four hundred men), Pedrarias "El Mancebo," Francisco de Vallejo, Gaspar de Morales, and Balboa, to mention but the expeditions of 1514–15, evidently in the hope that they could live off the land for a time.<sup>15</sup> The subsequent history of the colony, to 1519, is a continuation of this pattern of "cabalgadas" in search of gold and food and slaves. All of these combined mixtures of negotiation (from a position of strength) and often a spectacular brutality.

De Soto's first known participation in a raid was with Vasco Núñez de Balboa's expedition of August 1515 into the Cueva Indian province of "Dabaiba," up the Rio Grande River in Panama.<sup>16</sup> Balboa took 190 men in a fleet of thirteen small boats. Expecting to find gold mines and a large native population, and hence food, the Spaniards were bitterly disappointed on

<sup>14</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 68.

<sup>15</sup>Pablo Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias Dávila: Contribución al estudio de la figura del "Gran Justador," gobernador de Castilla del Oro y Nicaragua* (Madrid: Instituto Fernández de Oviedo, 1944), 209–10, 142–68. For gold presented for taxation, see Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:397–400, and, for slaves, 416.

<sup>16</sup>De Soto's testimony in Merits and Services interrogatory of Alonso Martín de San Benito, Lima, 26 October 1535, in Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:359–60; date from Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 171–73. If he had not already participated in Luís Carrillo's first expedition (end of 1514), or Pedrarias "El Mancebo's" expedition (July–September 1514), this entrada would have been his introduction to dealing with Indians in frontier conditions. None of these three entradas was very profitable. Carrillo presented 1,155 p. 6 tomines, Pedrarias 535 p., and Balboa only 154 p. in gold objects of various finenesses for taxation. See Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:398, 400, 416 for treasury entries.

both counts. They returned to Santa Maria del Darien with only 150 pesos de oro and a few slaves.<sup>17</sup>

De Soto's next known participation in an expedition was in 1517. In September 1517, he was a member of Juan de Tavira's exploration of the Rio Grande. When Tavira drowned, the men elected Francisco Pizarro their captain. He got the survivors back to Darien. Shortly after returning from this disaster, De Soto apparently went to work with Balboa in his construction of boats at the Island of Pearls, an activity that may have kept him busy into 1518.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently by the time of the Tavira expedition, De Soto and Hernán Ponce, already a captain, had begun their company, which included Francisco Campañón. In June 1535, they said that it was then eighteen or nineteen years old, which puts its creation in 1516 or 1517.<sup>19</sup>

The basis for forming the company can be inferred from what little we know of these men at the time. In December 1515, Ponce left Acla as part of Licenciado Espinosa's 210-man expedition along the Pacific Coast to Natá and the province of chief "Paris" in search, among other things, of a treasure that Gonzalo de Badajoz was supposed to have buried in the land of Paris earlier in 1515. At one point in this expedition, noted as the most brutal toward the Indians up to that time, Ponce and Bartolome Hurtado and some men went off in canoes to islands off the coast. They returned with abundant loot and many Indian slaves.<sup>20</sup> Thus by the time Espinosa returned to Acla in April of 1516, Ponce was wealthy.<sup>21</sup> De Soto, on the other hand, probably still had relatively little wealth. He was young, was a foot soldier, and had participated in only one expedition (that we know about). Tavira's expedi-

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. Balboa to SM (Su Majestad; Your Majesty, the king), 16 October 1515, in Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:142-43.

<sup>18</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrárias*, 191; Carl O. Sauer, *Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley, 1966), 259, 263; Testimony of De Soto, Lima, 26 October 1535, in Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:359-64, and 2:402, 411-12 for quinto entries.

<sup>19</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 68; see text of 1535 agreement in Solar and Rujula, *El Adelantado Hernando de Soto*, 80-82.

<sup>20</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrárias*, 188; on p. 190 he confuses this side trip with another by other men during Espinosa's 1519 expedition. Cf., *ibid.*, 276-78.

<sup>21</sup>Treasury records published by Medina, ed., in *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico* show that Espinosa's expedition turned in for taxation 725 p. of gold and paid 146 p. 5 t. 3 gr. (de oro) as the quinto on Indian slaves in April 1516; 55,298 p. 4 t. for taxation in March 1517; paid 1,724 p. 6 t. 11 gr. as the quinto on Indian slaves in June 1517; and turned in for taxation an undisclosed amount of pearls in this same period. *Ibid.*, 2:400, 417, 401, 411.

tion of September 1517 promised him a golden return, but outfitting for it was probably up to each man. De Soto may have needed help, which Ponce might have supplied in return for an equal share of any booty. Later, Ponce may have funded De Soto's purchase of a horse, again in return for a share of any incomes De Soto gained from participation in raids or other sources. Such an arrangement with De Soto, and perhaps others, was not only standard business at that time, it may also have been attractive, because, according to Alvarez Rubiano, Ponce was posted at this time to the site of Panama city as Pedrarias's lieutenant, a position that probably kept him out of the field and so away from loot.<sup>22</sup> Ponce's title of captain, bestowed by Pedrarias, probably also dates from his success in 1515-16.<sup>23</sup>

De Soto and Ponce next appear in the account of Espinosa's expedition of July to October 1519, in which they both participated. This expedition of 115 men and thirty horsemen (De Soto among the latter) set out from Panama in search of gold and food. This is a commonly told incident in De Soto's biography because he is credited with leading a cavalry charge that saved Espinosa and a part of the force when they were in danger of being destroyed by the Indians of Utraboa (or Urraca). At the time, De Soto was part of the land party commanded by Francisco Pizarro. De Soto later served as a witness of the submission of cacique Paris (August 1) and of the truth of an account of the expedition (city of Panama, October 18).<sup>24</sup> Later in 1519, Espinosa included De Soto among the occupiers of the new town of Santiago, at Natá, the site of natural sources of salt. Francisco Campañón was given command of the new settlement. Santiago was about thirty leagues from Panama city. Herrera's account makes De Soto a hero for going for aid when Utraboa's (or Urraboa's) Indians attacked Santiago.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 189-90.

<sup>23</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:207-8, stresses that only seven men had the title of captain when Pedrarias left Spain in 1514, but others, including Ponce and De Soto, were given the title afterward to honor an achievement or because "this name of captain was one of the principal sources of wealth or instrument for gaining [it]," that is, as a political favor.

<sup>24</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 69; account of the expedition in Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:272-317, with De Soto on pp. 292, 315-16, and *Colección de documentos inéditos, relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización, de las antiguas posesiones españolas de América y Oceanía, sacados de los archivos del reino, y muy especialmente del de Indias*, edited by Joaquín F. Pacheco, Francisco D. Cárdenas, and Luis Torres Mendoza, 42 vols. (Madrid, 1864-84) 20:56, 116 (cited hereafter as *DII*). Gold objects weighing 1,977 pesos were presented for taxation in November 1519. Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 2:404.

<sup>25</sup>Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las*

As a resident of Santiago de Natá, De Soto disappears from available records for the next four years. The only hint of what he and his partners were doing are the entries in the treasury records showing Ponce submitting gold objects for founding and taxation.<sup>26</sup> Thus we do not know what role, if any, De Soto played in Lic. Juan Rodríguez de Alarconcillo's superficial *residencia* of Pedrarias (1520) nor in the two years of delays that Pedrarias imposed on Gil Gonzalez Dávila and Andrés Niño (January 1520 to January 1522) nor in their expedition to Nicaragua, January 1522 to June 1523.<sup>27</sup> We can be fairly certain, however, that De Soto heard of the ninety thousand pesos de oro that Gonzalez Dávila and Niño brought back, of how Gonzalez Dávila fled to Santo Domingo rather than surrender twenty percent of the haul to Pedrarias, and of the conviction of the men that Gonzalez Dávila had found a water route across Central America from the Gulf of Fonseca via the Nicaraguan lakes and the San Juan River to the Caribbean. Pedrarias likely had no difficulty recruiting De Soto for the old governor's own expedition to Nicaragua.

Once Gil Gonzalez Dávila was out of the way, Pedrarias lost no time in organizing his own expedition to grab the newly discovered riches and potential waterway in Nicaragua. Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, Governor Diego Velazquez's first explorer of Mexico, was given command, with De Soto, Campañón, and Gabriel de Rojas as captains. The expedition departed Panama at the end of 1523 and spent 1524 conquering western Nicaragua, founding the towns of Granada, León, and Segovia during the course of the year.

Nicaragua, even more than Castilla del Oro (the isthmus of Panama), made the fortunes of the partners in the Ponce-De Soto-Campañón company. De Soto's role, as it apparently had been on the isthmus, was making war and obtaining its spoils, while Ponce provided supplies and managed De Soto's wealth.<sup>28</sup>

In Nicaragua, De Soto continued to be a leading Indian fighter and seems to have emerged as a preferred leader of punitive expeditions. In addition, he occasionally led exploring parties. The chronicles are silent about these activities in the first three years of the conquest, aside from noting his involve-

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*islas y tierra firme del mar oceano*, 1601, rpt., 17 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta Maestre, 1934-57), 5:355. See also Swanton, *Final Report*, 69.

<sup>26</sup>Mario Góngora, *Los grupos de conquistadores de tierra firme (1509-1530)* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad de Chile, 1962), 89.

<sup>27</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 270, 272-73, 319-27.

<sup>28</sup>Góngora, *Los grupos de conquistadores*, 48, 89.

ment in several expeditions associated with the struggle among the Spaniards for control of Nicaragua and Honduras; such expeditions inevitably involved subjugating and looting the Indians along the line of march.

The picture becomes clearer for the years 1527-30. In 1527, Diego López de Salcedo, who had seized the governorship of Nicaragua at a time when Pedrarias was undergoing his second residencia, used De Soto to suppress Indian rebellions.<sup>29</sup> Later that year, or early in 1528, De Soto was one of four captains sent to seek mines reported near Granada. They found good mines within fifteen leagues of the city. A second De Soto expedition later in 1528 had to return because of a shortage of food.<sup>30</sup> Finally, in 1530, Pedrarias sent De Soto and as many as a hundred men to suppress the Indian rebellion in the Islas de Petronilla up by the border with Guatemala. Apparently De Soto made two or three voyages for this purpose, each time returning with slaves. Juan Ruiz de Arce, one of the foot soldiers on at least one of these expeditions, was able to pay for his subsequent journey to Peru with his share of this (largely human) loot.<sup>31</sup>

De Soto's rewards for this leading role in the conquest of Nicaragua are, like his Indian fighting, poorly documented prior to 1527. The indirect evidence of his political position in these years (see below) suggests that he received one of the larger shares of the material and human loot. Some indication of what such a share might be is provided by a record of the agreement for the division of spoils from the first phase of the conquest. Dated at Hacoatega on May 1, 1524, this document called for the division of one hundred thousand pesos (weight?) of golden objects. De Soto was to receive one thousand pesos in fine gold for the services of his person, his horse, and a young black slave (*negrito*). Since it was recognized that the golden objects were of low karat, De Soto's share was to be much larger than the one percent suggested by the numbers. In the end, when reduced to sixteen-karat gold, this loot amounted to only 15,215 pesos. De Soto's share is not

<sup>29</sup>*Expediente*, Gov. López de Salcedo against Hernando de Saavedra and Capt. Diego de Albitez, Trujillo, 6 May 1528, in Andrés Vega Bolanes, ed., *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 17 vols. to 1957 (Madrid: Imprenta Juan Bravo, 1954-), 1:324, 344.

<sup>30</sup>Reply of Treasurer Rodrigo del Castillo to question 17 of Pedrarias's Interrogatory, León, 13 July 1528, *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 1:426; Pedrarias to SM, León, 15 January 1519, *ibid.*, 456.

<sup>31</sup>Testimony in reply to question 81 of Lic. Francisco Castañeda's interrogatory from his residencia as alcalde mayor of Nicaragua, León, January 1536, *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 4:268, 330-31 (and other places), and Juan Ruiz de Arce, "Advertencias que hizo el fundador del vínculo y mayorazgo a los sucesores en el," in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st Series, 1:413.



known, but the ordinary soldiers got about twelve pesos de oro after the king's fifth, various fees, and the expenses of the outfitting of the ships had been deducted.<sup>32</sup> Clearly this division did not make his fortune. But later divisions, and *encomienda* grants, did. When he was captured by Gil Gonzalez Dávila in 1524, De Soto and his men had 130,000 pesos of low-grade gold objects with them, according to Herrera, although Oviedo does not mention a figure.<sup>33</sup> By 1525, he was wealthy enough, and important enough politically, to be named one of the two *alcaldes ordinarios* of León and, two years later, to be nominated as a perpetual *regidor* of that city's council.<sup>34</sup>

The first clear indication of De Soto's economic rise to prominence comes from the time of López de Salcedo. According to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, who was in León at the time, López de Salcedo favored De Soto and Ponce with "very good caciques and Indians" so that they amassed great wealth. Apparently the governor's favor extended to regranting certain *encomiendas* held by other old settlers. One witness called in 1529 by Alcalde Mayor Francisco Castañeda said that De Soto had received the Indians of Hernán Gomez de Cortaya and that Ponce de León had been given ones belonging to Rodrigo Muriel. The *alcalde mayor* had restored the first to their former owner in the judgment of a lawsuit, and fear that he might do the same for Rodrigo Muriel caused the partners to reach an out-of-court settlement with him.<sup>35</sup> In addition, López de Salcedo allowed the shipment of Indian slaves from Nicaragua to Panama. Evidence from 1529 shows that the Ponce-De Soto partnership had an interest in the trade at that time (see below).<sup>36</sup> Certainly, De Soto's suppression of Indian rebellions in 1527 and 1530, noted above, would have provided captives to be sold.

In addition to their *encomiendas*, and interest in the trade in Indian slaves, the partners had interests in mines. Some years later, when Pedrarias was trying to justify not naming either De Soto or Ponce, by then very wealthy men and favored by Alcalde Mayor Castañeda, as *regidores* of

<sup>32</sup>Góngora, *Los grupos de conquistadores*, 48, 53, 89.

<sup>33</sup>Cited in Swanton, *Final Report*, 69-70; Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:302.

<sup>34</sup>Replies to question 8, *Diligencias, re election of Alcaldes* for 1530, León, January 1530, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:500, 515, 545, 548; Instructions for Procuradores, León, 30 July 1527, *ibid.*, 1:261.

<sup>35</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:351; Información de parte de Castañeda, León, 17 September 1529, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:136. López de Salcedo helped himself as well as those he wanted to influence. Pedrarias charged that he took 9,000 Indians from others! Pedrarias to king, León, 15 January 1529, *ibid.*, 1:451-52.

<sup>36</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 70, is certain of their participation in the slave trade.

León, he found witnesses to testify that when Ponce was *alcalde ordinario* in 1527 he spent most of the year at the mines of Gracias a Díos instead of attending to the duties of his office.<sup>37</sup> In 1528, Pedrarias sent De Soto and other captains to discover mines near Granada, apparently with some success. Ordinarily the discoverer of a mine, and his political superiors, enjoyed a share in it; that probably happened with any mines that De Soto discovered on this occasion.

Finally, by the spring of 1529, the Ponce-De Soto partnership had branched out into shipping. According to Licenciado Castañeda, at the end of March they had a ship, the *San Gerónimo*, ready for launching, a ship that was one of the largest yet built on the Pacific Coast. By that fall, he could charge that Pedrarias had taken control of the carpenters the partners had employed, in order to prevent them from building two or three more ships and engaging in exploration. Pedrarias, he claimed, wanted to monopolize the carrying trade from Panama to Nicaragua; in an earlier letter he listed the five ships (the *San Gerónimo* was not yet launched) engaged in that trade, only one of which belonged to Pedrarias.<sup>38</sup>

Aside from their offices in 1525 and 1527, De Soto's and Ponce's wealth is indicated by various levies that they, and other *encomenderos*, were required to pay in the years 1529-33. Thus in 1529, they were among six men each required to supply or support one soldier for a force being sent to "conquer" the mines of Gracias a Díos. Other *encomenderos* had to contribute only part of the support of a soldier. In 1532, De Soto and Ponce were among the nine men assessed fifty pesos de oro or more to pay for another force sent to guard the mines at Villa de Santa María de Buena Esperanza. The two most common assessments were thirty pesos (twenty-four instances) and twenty pesos (twenty-two instances).<sup>39</sup> Finally, in 1533, Ponce and De Soto together, in common with only two other *encomenderos*, were required to supply three Indians for training as Christians, who could in turn instruct their fellows. Fourteen other *encomenderos* had to supply two Indians each; the rest, only one each.<sup>40</sup> In sum, these levies indicated that Ponce and De Soto *each* had *encomiendas* that ranked them among the half-dozen richest men in León.

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<sup>37</sup>*Diligencias*, León, January 1530, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:500, as question 10, with confirming testimony following.

<sup>38</sup>Castañeda to SM, 30 March, 5 October 1529, in *ibid.*, 2:492; 2:209-10.

<sup>39</sup>Order of Pedrarias, León, 28 October 1529, in *ibid.*, 2:225; Act of Cabildo, León, 8 January 1532, *ibid.*, 3:258-69.

<sup>40</sup>Order of Lic. Castañeda, 28 September 1533, in *ibid.*, 4:508.

The partners' wealth is also indicated by their house. It was located on León's principal street, next door to the cathedral. Too, in September 1529, they were the second owners in the town (Castañeda was the first) to rebuild with *tapiaria* construction.<sup>41</sup>

De Soto's political role during his years in Nicaragua shows a man rapidly maturing from the position of a loyal subordinate to that of a man with political savvy who established a degree of independence within the autocratic, not to say authoritarian, political system that Pedrarias maintained until his death in 1530. When Gil Gonzalez Dávila invaded Nicaragua from Honduras in 1524, Hernández de Córdoba sent Gabriel de Rojas and then De Soto to warn him off. Unlike Rojas, who avoided an armed confrontation with Gonzalez Dávila (because he said he lacked enough men), De Soto was drawn into the night battle of Toreba, where he and his men were captured by a trick and suffered a number of casualties.<sup>42</sup> Only Gonzalez Dávila's return to Honduras because of Cristobal de Olid's arrival there turned this defeat into a qualified victory. Nonetheless, De Soto received his reward: the position of *alcalde ordinario* in León. But he failed to exercise his office because, said his longtime friend Sebastian Benalcazar, De Soto knew that Hernández de Córdoba was affronted by his election.<sup>43</sup> Still the careful subordinate, De Soto avoided giving offense to the lieutenant governor.

A reason for Hernández de Córdoba's dislike for De Soto is suggested by De Soto's behavior later that year (1525), when Hernández de Córdoba decided to throw off Pedrarias's lordship over Nicaragua. De Soto, as *alcalde*, upheld Pedrarias's authority and was jailed. Campañón and nine other Pedrarias loyalists broke him out of jail and, after standing down Hernández de Córdoba and a small force that went in their pursuit, went overland to the Gulf of Fonseca, where they took a ship to Natá, from which they sent word to Pedrarias at Panama. De Soto and the others joined Pedrarias when he went to León early the next year and beheaded Hernández de Córdoba after the briefest of informal judicial proceedings.<sup>44</sup> Pedrarias then set about put-

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 2:344, 137, respectively.

<sup>42</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:302.

<sup>43</sup>*Diligencias*, León, January 1530, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:515, confirmed on 545, 548. Benalcazar did get him to walk about with the *vara* (the symbol of the office) for a few days at the very end of his year as *alcalde*, but apparently that was after Pedrarias had executed Hernández de Córdoba.

<sup>44</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:169; documents in Medina, ed., *Descubrimiento del oceano Pacifico*, 1:225, 314, and 2:205, 357-360; Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 334; Swanton, *Final Report*, 70.

ting the province in order, according to his ideas, and asserting a claim to Honduras!<sup>45</sup>

Pedr rias did not long enjoy his newly reestablished authority in Nicaragua. In August 1526, Pedro de los R os, his replacement as governor of Castilla del Oro, arrived on the isthmus. Pedr rias returned to Panama in January 1527, to begin his second residencia. He quickly persuaded R os that Nicaragua belonged to his (R os's) jurisdiction, even though Gil Gonzalez D vila had been granted it as early as 1520 and again in 1524. But Gonzalez D vila had died in 1526. Pedr rias's wife and other agents already had asked that Pedr rias be appointed governor of Nicaragua, but that grant had not been made. It is not clear whether officials at Panama knew that the Audiencia of Santo Domingo had appointed Diego L pez de Salcedo to go to Honduras and Nicaragua to resolve the multisided jurisdictional conflicts that had arisen in 1524 when Pedr rias, Hern n Cort s, Cristobal de Olid, and Gonzalez D vila were contesting for control of the two provinces. In any case, getting R os to go to Nicaragua to claim it for Castilla del Oro not only got him out of Panama, giving Pedr rias a freer hand to attend to his affairs there, but also furthered Pedr rias's claims to the province.

The apparent ending of Pedr rias's rule in Castilla del Oro, and possibly Nicaragua, afforded De Soto and Ponce an important political opportunity that they seized, to their profit. R os arrived at Le n only a few days after L pez de Salcedo did, coming overland from Honduras. Both presented their titles and asserted a claim to govern Nicaragua. The *cabildo*, heavily stacked with Pedr rias's supporters (he had selected the regidores and the *alcaldes ordinarios*), decided that R os' title was limited to Castilla del Oro. L pez de Salcedo was installed as governor. Hernando de Soto was made the captain of his guard and proposed for the position of perpetual regidor. Hern n Ponce de Le n was already serving as *alcalde ordinario*. A redistribution of Indians was made, supposedly with the concurrence of the captains (De Soto and Ponce both held that rank) and principal persons. L pez de Salcedo and his new supporters, including De Soto and Ponce, were the chief beneficiaries.<sup>46</sup> De Soto and Ponce were beginning to assert a degree of political independence from their former commander, Pedr rias.

This situation did not last. On March 16, 1527, the queen signed orders making Pedr rias the governor of Nicaragua, permitting Pedr rias to remove his moveable property from Panama duty free, allowing him to leave an

<sup>45</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:366-67.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 3:367.

agent to answer for him during his residencia, and allowing his servants and clients (*criados*) to freely immigrate to Nicaragua. In short, Pedrarias was allowed to move his operation to Nicaragua. López de Salcedo was instructed to concern himself solely with Honduras. At the same time, a new alcalde mayor, Francisco Castañeda, and a royal treasurer, Diego de la Tovilla, were named to provide checks on the old tyrant. In addition, Martín Enriquez, Martín de Medrano, and Diego de Madrigal were named permanent regidores of León, another way to restricting Pedrarias's power.<sup>47</sup>

The news of Pedrarias's appointment reached León late in 1527 or early in 1528. Martín de Estete, one of Pedrarias's faithful followers, organized others to prevent López de Salcedo from resisting Pedrarias's advent, as rumor and some of his actions seemed to suggest that he might. Still other men joined upon the rumor that López de Salcedo would flee to Honduras, defrauding his creditors in Nicaragua. De Soto joined this faction, whether initially or later in the conspiracy is not known. Such, comments Oviedo, was De Soto's payment for the good works that López de Salcedo had done for him.<sup>48</sup>

The crisis came to a head when Pedrarias landed on the Nicaraguan coast on March 24, 1528. López de Salcedo, after unsuccessfully trying to disperse the conspirators, fled to sanctuary in the cathedral, which is where Pedrarias found him upon entering León. López de Salcedo emerged from the church and publically acknowledged Pedrarias as the new governor. But he was not allowed to leave town. The cabildo and persons with claims against the former governor demanded that he post bonds to ensure them of payment in the settlement of lawsuits they were lodging. When he failed to do so, he was jailed, remaining in the fort until he agreed to pay certain claims. Pedrarias released him on January 8, 1529.<sup>49</sup>

Having changed loyalties at the right moment, De Soto continued to be an important member of León's society although he was likely less subservient to Pedrarias's will than formerly. Pedrarias's decision to send him to discover mines may have been an award, although the old man may also have hoped De Soto would place himself in a fatal position. But De Soto returned, apparently having found mines that added to his wealth.

De Soto soon confronted a more complex political situation, however.

<sup>47</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 353-55.

<sup>48</sup>Oviedo, *Historia general*, 3:351.

<sup>49</sup>Pedrarias to SM, León, 15 January 1529, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 1:448-51; Juan Perez de Tudela Bueso, "Vida y escritos de Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo," in Oviedo, *Historia general*, 1:cvi.

The arrival of Lic. Castañeda, Treasurer Tobilla, and Veedor Alonso Perez de Valera later that spring challenged Pedrarias's exercise of authority. Tobilla seems to have accepted the old man's autocratic rule, but Castañeda and, even more, Perez de Valera challenged it. By mid-June (?) 1529, Perez de Valera had tried and failed to organize an opposition, even approaching De Soto. According to Ponce, De Soto had replied that "he would serve and support the lord governor as he had always done."<sup>50</sup> De Soto himself said during an investigation of this situation that he talked with Pedrarias often and intimately about persons and events, a comment suggesting that he continued in the man's good graces and thus in the role of loyal subordinate.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, De Soto and Ponce were careful to cultivate Lic. Castañeda, even though he found against De Soto in the Gomez de Cortaya lawsuit. In fact, De Soto praised the alcalde mayor for providing justice, where before Pedrarias had appointed judges with little learning or ability to decide suits.<sup>52</sup> De Soto and Ponce also befriended Francisco Hurtado, a royally appointed perpetual regidor. Hurtado became their informant about the business of the cabildo.<sup>53</sup>

De Soto and Ponce's increasingly independent (of Pedrarias) political position was further enhanced by Diego de Almagro's efforts during 1529 to recruit men and obtain new partners for his and Francisco Pizarro and Hernando de Luque's company for the exploration of Peru. Once a member, Pedrarias had been bought out after the first voyage had failed to provide much return. But after the second voyage turned up promising evidence of a complex, wealthy Indian society, the old man seems to have renewed his interest in the venture. When, therefore, Almagro sent Nicolás de Ribera and Bartolomé Ruiz to Nicaragua to solicit aid from Ponce, De Soto, and Pedrarias, the latter used his authority to try to either regain a share of the venture or again, as with Gil Gonzalez Dávila, to get the jump on a rival by organizing his own expedition before Pizarro and Almagro could get theirs going.

Ribera and Ruiz appeared in Nicaragua in June 1529, aboard a ship belonging to Almagro and Pizarro. After what may have been failed negotiations with Pedrarias, Ruiz began to openly recruit. Pedrarias issued orders

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<sup>50</sup>Información, León, 17 September 1519, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:126.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 132.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 531.

that no person or ship could leave Nicaraguan waters without his permission and, in the case of ships, a register of all persons and cargo. With his ship anchored offshore, but using a bark from the Ponce-De Soto ship, now launched, Ruiz nightly ferried the daring from shore to ship. Eventually as many as 132 persons were aboard, with another 90 said to be waiting on shore.<sup>54</sup> Meanwhile, according to Alvarez Rubiano, Pedrarias tried to force Ponce and De Soto (and probably others) into a company that would sail to Peru, but these talks failed when Ponce and De Soto demanded command, probably for De Soto. Ruiz did, however, obtain Ponce's agreement to sail to Panama to await Pizarro's return and the negotiation of an agreement for the use of the *San Gerónimo*. With that achieved and as many Spaniards and Indian slaves as his ship could carry, Ruiz and his illegal passengers sailed for Panama. This development eventually provided a reason why the *San Gerónimo* should be sent to Panama.<sup>55</sup>

Scheming associated with Peru continued. Witnesses Pedrarias later called to support his refusal to select De Soto or Ponce or other persons that Castañeda supported for regidor and alcalde ordinario for 1530 testified that they had heard that Ponce, De Soto, and Castañeda had formed a company to build additional ships for the Peruvian venture. Ponce was said to have complained that summer that he could not make a living in Nicaragua, even though he held one of the better encomiendas. It was also alleged that De Soto's opposition to Pedrarias's plan to send Miguel Estete to "Morotege, Maslalata, and Cozcatan" was motivated by a desire to keep Spaniards in Nicaragua so that they could be recruited for a Peruvian venture under the Ponce-De Soto-Castañeda company. De Soto himself said that Estete was not fit to command and was being preferred only because he was a "criado" of Pedrarias and married to one of his female servants.<sup>56</sup> Estete eventually went anyway.

Since by this time Perez de Valera was no longer welcomed in León and wished to return to Spain, Ponce sought permission to take him to Panama in the *San Gerónimo*. Because there was no money to pay for her freighting, on August 19, permission was granted for the ship to carry Indian slaves to the Panama market. She was finally fully loaded by mid-October with 347

<sup>54</sup>Alvarez Rubiano, *Pedrarias*, 365-66; Inquiry, León, 3 July 1529, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:32, 37, 45-56.

<sup>55</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 71, follows Herrera in misdating these events to 1530.

<sup>56</sup>*Diligencias*, León, January 1530, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 2:507, 512-16, 532; De Soto's testimony, *Información*, León, 17 September 1529, *ibid.*, 132-38.

slaves (some belonging to Ponce and De Soto) and fifteen *naborias*, besides her crew of nine, two of whom were black. Three Indian slaves also served with the crew. Apparently Ponce sailed with her.<sup>57</sup>

The final rounds in the drama of De Soto's political life in Nicaragua involved the selection of the *alcaldes ordinarios* of León for 1530 and his role as commander in the expeditions against the Petronilla islanders. The first, and perhaps the second, suggests some estrangement between Pedrarias and his former protégés. In brief, Castañeda proposed a number of candidates for *alcalde ordinario* and for *regidor*, but Pedrarias refused to appoint them, selecting instead men in whom he had confidence. Pedrarias justified this by long custom, from Castilla del Oro, and by having witnesses show that De Soto and Ponce, to discuss only the men of interest to us, had both failed to perform when they had been *alcaldes* on earlier occasions (1525(?) and 1527, respectively). The governor had his way.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, when he ordered De Soto to the Petronilla Islands, the captain obeyed. As has been noted, his purse was the better for it.

Probably by the time De Soto returned from the Petronilla campaign, Pedrarias was dead (March 6, 1530), a death that removed the last obligations that De Soto may have felt to the man he had served faithfully in Panama and whose patronage had sent him to Nicaragua and given him the opportunity to establish a more independent position, one from which he moved on to Peru.

Almagro's activities on behalf of the Pizarro-Almagro-Luque partnership came to a halt when Francisco Pizarro returned to Panama and told his associate that the Council of the Indies had insisted that only one man be in command of the projected conquest. Pedro Pizarro, not a wholly unbiased reporter, says that Almagro and Luque both withdrew from the company and began to claim as their own certain funds and supplies that had been accumulated against Francisco's return. Efforts by third parties to resolve the conflict got nowhere.

At that point, according to Pedro Pizarro, Ponce showed up with his ship (he erroneously says two ships) and a load of slaves. This was the *San Gerónimo*, whose preparations in the summer and fall of 1529 have been noted. Hernando Pizarro, acting for his brother, negotiated a contract for the use of the ship on terms very favorable to the Ponce-De Soto company. De Soto was to be made lieutenant governor of the chief Spanish town, and

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 2:84-88, 264-77.

<sup>58</sup>*Diligencias*, León, January 1530, in *ibid.*, 2:467-556.



Ponce would get a choice encomienda, in addition to the freight of the ship and any shares they earned from participation in the venture. This agreement, which made the trip to Peru possible without Almagro or Luque's participation, caused Almagro to back down and enter again into the old partnership, although with strained feelings and bad intentions, according to Pedro Pizarro.<sup>59</sup> In light of later events, it is difficult to see how the venture could have succeeded without Almagro's support from Panama during 1531 and 1532.

Preparations dragged on until the end of December 1530. The chroniclers who discuss the matter agree that many Spaniards did not want to go to Peru because they had heard reports of the hardships of the second voyage. Finally, either on December 27, 1530, or about January 1, 1531, the three ships, 180 men, and about thirty horses departed.<sup>60</sup> The *San Gerónimo* carried the five Pizarros, most of the foot soldiers, and as many of the horses as could be crammed aboard.<sup>61</sup>

For reasons that are unexplained except for Zarate's claim of adverse winds, the force was landed not on the Peruvian coast, but at San Mateo Bay in Ecuador, a good hundred leagues from the original goal, which seems to have been Tumbez.<sup>62</sup> The town of Coaque was captured, and perhaps three thousand pesos in loot, including several gold crowns, were sent back to Nicaragua and Panama to lure more men and capital into the venture. The *San Gerónimo* returned to Nicaragua at this time. Bartolomé Ruiz was her pilot.<sup>63</sup> In Nicaragua, Ponce already had two other ships, at least one named *La Concepción*, under construction.

The first relief to reach Pizarro came from Panama thanks to Almagro and Pedro Gregorio, a merchant. Probably in early November 1531, this ship brought a load of supplies, the royal treasury officials assigned to the expedition, about twenty men, and thirteen horses. Thus resupplied, the force marched south to Puerto Viejo, where, on November 15, they saw the two small ships that Sebastian de Benalcazar had used to reach the coast. He and

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<sup>59</sup>Pedro Pizarro, *Relación*, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st Series, 1:452, 454-55; see also Swanton, *Final Report*, 71, for Hernando Pizarro's own recollection of this contract.

<sup>60</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 6-7, n. 7.

<sup>61</sup>Zarate, "Historia del descubrimiento y conquista del Peru," *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st series, 2:145.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup>Pedro Pizarro, *Relación*, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st series, 1:456; Diego de Trujillo, "Relación," in *ibid.*, 2:14; Ruiz and one of these crowns is mentioned in Lic. Castañeda's *residencia* in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 4:56.

his force of thirty men and twelve horses had landed up the coast but soon joined Pizarro's army. That force, rapidly sickening, marched farther south, to Puna Island in the Gulf of Guayaquil. There on December 1, Hernando de Soto arrived with two ships, both called *La Concepción* according to the treasury records of the expedition. He had about a hundred men and twenty-five horses.<sup>64</sup>

Pedro Pizarro recorded that De Soto's arrival gave Francisco Pizarro and his men "great happiness and contentment," although the new arrivals felt quite differently, having left the "paradise" of Nicaragua to find themselves on an island with hostile Indians, little food, disease, and no gold or silver. De Soto, he says, refused to leave out of pride; his men were unable to leave.<sup>65</sup> Apparently the ships were sent north almost as soon as they had been unloaded. For his part, Francisco Pizarro may have regretted the bargain made at Panama. The Gregorio-Almagro and Benalcazar reinforcements showed that men, and horsemen, could be attracted to the venture. Ponce's price for the horses and men that De Soto had brought, in comparatively small numbers, may have begun to seem large.

Although preparations for a move to Tumbez began in February 1532, the army required months to make the journey and even more time before it was ready to enter the mountains to challenge the Inca empire. Finding Tumbez devastated, the Spaniards moved on, leaving Tumbez on May 16. They arrived in late July at Tangarara, the site of the first founding of the town of San Miguel (de Piura). There, on August 1, more supplies were received in the *Santa Catalina*, master Juan Pichón, and in the bark, *Santo Domingo*, master Juan de San Juan. Almagro seems to have been responsible for this aid, which made a venture inland thinkable. As a first step, the town of San Miguel was formally founded on October 4 with forty vecinos and about twenty other Spaniards as its residents. The old, infirm, and weak were left, although promised a share of any loot.<sup>66</sup>

Hernando de Soto's activities to this point are not recorded except for his service as judge at Tumbez when Francisco Pizarro wished to make a formal complaint against the treasury officials.<sup>67</sup> Far from being the sort of judicial authority that he had been unwilling to exercise in León in 1525, this judicial

<sup>64</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 7-9, and notes.

<sup>65</sup>Pedro Pizarro, *Relación*, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st series, 1:459.

<sup>66</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 9.

<sup>67</sup>Testimony of Jeronimo de Aliaga, in *Pesquisa*, by Bishop Tomás de Verlanga, Lima, 20 August 1535, *DII*, 10:246.

role was the formal one of authorizing an inquiry before a notary. It required no exercise of judgment or impartiality.

As the army prepared to move inland, De Soto took up a role long congenial to his temperament, and which had earned him the respect of many men in Nicaragua: commanding forces sent to scout and combat Indians. Lockhart interprets the evidence to suggest that De Soto's dash and horsemanship and the personal loyalty of most of the men who had come from Nicaragua under his command were winning him additional followers from among men raised in the western, Badajoz region of Extremadura, thereby creating a political threat to Francisco Pizarro's leadership, which was based on the allegiance of men from the Trujillo region of eastern Extremadura. To counter this development, "the Pizarros decided to give him his head, letting him ride out in command of the vanguard, where he might exceed his orders and plot mutinies, but was at least out of the way."<sup>68</sup> A few trusted loyalists were sent along to keep an eye on this restless subordinate.

Although Herrera credits him with an attack on the chiefs of Cango and Icotu, the first opportunity for De Soto to exercise his new role—which was also compatible with his position as Pizarro's putative lieutenant—was to scout Cajas, a town in the foothills about twenty leagues from San Miguel. His patrol found it devastated because it had supported Huascar in the war between him and Atahualpa. In addition to a small amount of gold seized as loot, De Soto allowed his men to indulge themselves with some of the five hundred women from the Holy Woman's building (the *acllas* and *mamaconas*), much to the anger of Atahualpa's envoy, who was in the town scouting the Spaniards when this outrage against Inca law and custom took place.<sup>69</sup>

During the march into the mountains and to Cajamarca, De Soto seems to have stayed with the main body of the army. But once at Cajamarca, Pizarro sent De Soto with fifteen horsemen and an interpreter to invite Atahualpa to visit him. At one point in the interview, De Soto is credited with charging his horse right up to Atahualpa's throne, then causing the beast to rear on its hind legs, froth from its flanks (or mouth) falling on the emperor. Another version has the animal's breath stirring the imperial fringe

<sup>68</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 84.

<sup>69</sup>Swanton, *Final Report*, 72, on the basis of Herrera, *Historia general*, dec. 4:178 and 5:7; question 8, Merits and Services interrogatory of Fernando Beltrán, Seville, 18 October 1536, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 3:466–87; see also John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970), 30, 32.

(the sign of his office) on the man's forehead. At once an act of spontaneous intimidation, bravado, and foolish, infantile showmanship, the act fits well with De Soto's character as seen by many of his contemporaries and should be interpreted as a sign of one aspect of his personality.<sup>70</sup> Hernando Pizarro was right to worry about De Soto and to obtain permission to take twenty more horsemen to the Inca's camp.<sup>71</sup>

Following Atahualpa's capture and while his ransom was being gathered, De Soto seems to have accompanied Hernando Pizarro on the march to and from Pachacamac. The story that he was one of two Spaniards to go to Cuzco to collect part of the ransom is false, a case of later writers transferring an unusual deed to a man whose reputation fitted with such a deed.<sup>72</sup> The march to Pachacamac and back took from February to early April 1533. Among the trophies was Chalcuchima, one of Atahualpa's generals, who had agreed to accompany Hernando Pizarro from Jauja to Cajamarca.

Not long after Hernando Pizarro and his men returned to Cajamarca, Almagro appeared with some two hundred new men. Lockhart suggests that these men provided the Pizarros with enough loyal troops so that they could more effectively elbow aside potential rivals such as Benalcázar and De Soto. Thus in the division of the ransom during late July—the new men were excluded—Benalcázar and a number of lesser leaders received only modestly larger sums than the private soldiers. De Soto received 4 shares of the 217 distributed, while Francisco Pizarro claimed 13 and Hernando Pizarro, his actual second in command, took 7. The other Pizarro brothers, who had not exercised any leadership roles, received 2.5 shares each. But unlike Benalcázar, who took the hint and shortly left central Peru as the escort for the king's twenty percent of the ransom, De Soto stayed on. He still had the contractual promise of a lieutenancy in the best city the Spaniards might found.<sup>73</sup>

De Soto's general attitude toward Indians and his barely disguised efforts to gather a loyal following probably account for his next action: the burning

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<sup>70</sup>I thus disagree somewhat with Swanton's assessment that "De Soto was still young and this looks very much like an outburst of boyish 'showing off.'" *Final Report*, 72.

<sup>71</sup>Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*, 34. Atahualpa's willingness to talk with Hernando Pizarro, but his silence in response to De Soto's earlier speech, may well have galled the (slightly) older man. Hernando was about thirty, De Soto about thirty-two. Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 157, 190.

<sup>72</sup>Porrás Barrenechea, "Notes" on Pedro Pizarro, *Relación*, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st series, 2:64; Swanton, *Final Report*, 72, repeats the traditional, false story.

<sup>73</sup>Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 80–81, 84.

of Chalcuchima. The Spaniards were convinced that he knew where a quantity of gold was hidden. When he denied any knowledge of it, De Soto took him aside and threatened to burn him if he did not tell where the gold was. When he again claimed ignorance of the matter, he was tied to a stake and a fire was begun that burned his arms and legs before he was removed, still denying he knew where any gold was to be found. On a previous occasion, in Castilla del Oro, De Soto was also said to have used fire to try to torture information out of an Indian leader. Some of his later actions in La Florida fit into this pattern of deliberate, even sadistic violence.<sup>74</sup>

Not long after this, in July, De Soto, Rodrigo Orgoñez, Pedro Ortiz, Miguel Estete, and Lope Velez volunteered to scout for the Inca army under Ruminavi, which was reported to be marching toward Cajamarca with the intention of freeing Atahualpa. They found no evidence of the army at the place it was said to be.

While De Soto and his companions were gone, the 153 men who remained at Cajamarca and who were already planning to march on Cuzco, allowed fear to decide Atahualpa's fate. On the night of July 26, the Inca was garroted. De Soto, supposed by many writers of a romantic bent to have been opposed to the execution, seems to have commented only that it would have been better if he could have been shipped to Spain. He did not question that Atahualpa could not be left, alive, in Peru much longer. As Hemming has argued, the Inca had served his purpose and would have been a liability on the march to Cuzco. Hemming's careful review of how the various generations of sixteenth-century chroniclers treated this event suggests that De Soto's alleged position on this matter as well as Almagro's and the new arrivals' lack of sympathy for the man (and role in urging his execution) need to be dealt with cautiously. Panic at the realization of where they were and how few they were seems to explain why the Spaniards decided to kill Atahualpa.<sup>75</sup>

With Atahualpa dead and his ransom divided, the army left Cajamarca for Cuzco on August 11, 1533. On October 12, they reached Jauja. On the 24th, De Soto and a small force were dispatched to march ahead of the main body of the army, in the hope that he could seize and hold various bridges before the Inca army could destroy them. Thus given his head, De Soto bulled ahead, fighting the Inca at Vilcas, October 29, and at Vilcacongá on

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<sup>74</sup>Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*, 69-70; Porrás Barrenechea, "Notes," to Pedro Pizarro, *Relación*, in *Biblioteca Peruana*, 1st series, 2:97-98.

<sup>75</sup>Hemming, *Conquest of the Incas*, 76-85.

November 8 and 9. In the latter battle, unlike the first, his rash charges nearly cost him his men, the precious horses (who were worth more in battle than foot soldiers), and his life. Only the timely arrival of Almagro and forty horsemen saved him. He had disobeyed orders to wait for the body of the Spanish army at Vilcashuaman, apparently because he and his men wanted to be the first to get to Cuzco and its remaining loot (it had already been stripped to make up Atahualpa's ransom). For the rest of the march to Cuzco, De Soto kept company with the army. After another battle on the approach to Cuzco's valley, the army arrived at that city on November 15. Chalcuchima, saved in April from a fiery death and carried with the army as a hostage to ensure that his troops did not attack, was executed by burning on November 13, because Francisco Pizarro and De Soto were convinced (on purely circumstantial evidence) that he had been behind the attacks at Vilcas and Vilcaonga and the approaches to Cuzco.<sup>76</sup>

From Cuzco, where Manco Inca had been installed as puppet ruler, De Soto was sent on two expeditions to seek out Quisquis and his army of Ecuadorian Indians. This army had conquered Cuzco for Atahualpa during the civil war. Manco Inca was one of Huascar's relatives, now continuing the civil war with the help of his new friends. The first of these expeditions, in December 1533, involved fifty Spanish horsemen and five thousand Inca soldiers from Cuzco on a ten-day march to the southwest that failed to take them into contact with Quisquis. The second, from the end of January to early March 1534, involved Almagro, fifty Spaniards, Manco Inca (for part of the journey) and some twenty thousand native troops. The line of march was toward Jauja, but the army arrived three weeks after the Spaniards there (led by the royal treasurer Riquelme) had defeated units of Quisquis's army, with help from the local Indians and Quisquis's own blundering tactics. An attempt to dislodge Quisquis from a pass that he had fortified failed. De Soto and Almagro retired to Jauja to await Francisco Pizarro and Manco Inca.

Pizarro and Manco Inca reached Jauja in mid-April 1534. A subsequent attempt by Gonzalo Pizarro, De Soto, Manco Inca, eighty Spaniards and four thousand Inca warriors (mid-May to early June) to catch Quisquis, resulted in some fighting but not the engagement of the main body of his army, which was retreating toward Ecuador.<sup>77</sup>

Having conquered Huascar's empire and found an apparently compliant

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<sup>76</sup>*Ibid.*, 107-09.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 126-41, *passim*.

puppet ruler, Pizarro set about consolidating his power. To that end, on July 27, 1534, he issued instructions to Hernando de Soto for his position as lieutenant governor at Cuzco, the rich city promised to him in the negotiations at Panama in 1530.

Pizarro's instructions to De Soto indicate that his authority was to be quite limited. De Soto was to have no authority in legal cases, although he was to secretly inquire about any gold or silver that the eighty Spanish residents might have found and was to see to the enforcement of Pizarro's decrees concerning the good treatment of the Indians and their instruction in the Catholic religion. Too, he was to guard the city against Indian attacks or disorder.<sup>78</sup> Whether Pizarro really expected De Soto to meekly accept these limitations cannot be known.

Pizarro also turned his attention to the question of who would control Ecuador. As early as October 24, 1533, Sebastian Benalcazar, then at San Miguel preparing to sail for Panama and Spain, had learned that Alvarado was on his way from Guatemala to challenge Pizarro's conquest, on the claim that he was operating south of the area of his (Pizarro's) grant, in an area that Alvarado had been given by the king. This attempted claim jumping had been revealed by events in Nicaragua on the night of July 22. Alvarado had entered the Port of Posession and seized two large ships, Ponce-De Soto's *La Concepción* (returned from her trip with De Soto in 1531), and Pedro Bravo and Cristobal de Burgos's *La Vitoria*, along with the ship tackle and anchors for three smaller ships that were being careened. All five were being prepared to carry Captain Gabriel de Rojas and 180 or so men (with a hundred horses) to Peru on behalf of Lic. Castañeda, now Governor of Nicaragua after Pedrarias's death, and other, unnamed parties. Ponce and Bravo's efforts to get their ships back had failed, as had Luis de Moscoso's efforts on behalf of his cousin Alvarado to buy horses from Castañeda or, apparently, to bribe him to prevent Rojas from sailing for Peru until after Alvarado had gotten on his own way there. Rojas had left Nicaragua on September 16, sailing directly to San Miguel, although with only a few men.<sup>79</sup> Benalcazar sent him to tell Pizarro. Rojas arrived at Jauja just before Quisquis attacked in mid-February 1534. He conveyed his news upon Pizarro's arrival there in mid-April.

Acting on Rojas's information, Benalcazar set out for Ecuador about mid-

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<sup>78</sup>DII, 42:132-34.

<sup>79</sup>Información, San Miguel, 24 October 1533, in *Documentos para la historia de Nicaragua*, 3:283-304; date from *ibid.*, 4:459.